

Project: Futuring Peace in Northeast Asia

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Future of Regional Narrative Building in Northeast Asia

Policy Recipes by Youth Peacebuilders

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Executive Summary



Futuring peace in Northeast Asia - an initiative by the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UN DPPA), is dedicated to strengthening opportunities for Northeast Asian youth to share their unique observations for regional peace and security with policymakers, as a step towards broader representation of youth in high-level policy fora. For the second phase in 2022, the project has been executed in collaboration with the Swiss foreign policy think-tank foraus, and co-designed and co-facilitated by youth from China, Japan, Mongolia, and the Republic of Korea. The pilot project in 2021 developed in partnership with UNESCO and with support from the National Assembly Futures Institute of Korea, and focused on training-the-trainer and building capabilities of futures visioning. More than 40 youth participants from the region were trained in digital facilitation and Futures Literacy methodology for applied foresight that considered the specific context of the region.

The objective of phase II was to use participatory strategic foresight tools to develop concrete policy recommendations for policymakers, regional institutions, and governments, to ensure pathways to a peaceful future for the region. This report is the result of a series of virtual workshops and crowd-sourced policy actions centralized by youth peacebuilders and created by more than 140 intergenerational participants. Questions were framed using the “Futures Triangle” approach, probing participants to think about future outcomes by looking at three dimensions: the push of the present, the pull from the future, and the weight of the past. Through collective scenario building and testing, participants explored different scenarios and identified four key areas for policymaking that will achieve the preferred trajectories, while avoiding and mitigating those unwanted to ensure a peaceful future:

1. Public-Private Sector Collaboration for Digital Literacy Programs in Northeast Asia to address the growing presence of hate speech, prejudice, misogyny, and antagonism online, in particular on social media platforms, and to enable the creation of online safe spaces for cultural exchanges by

- Developing in-school digital literacy programs for students.
- Developing out-of-school digital literacy programs for the public.
- Developing digital space policies for safety and inclusiveness.

2. Furthering Educational and Technological Cooperation for Northeast Asian youth to promote inter-regional dialogues, learning from other cultures, and being exposed to different perspectives by

- Increasing funding for second language studies abroad.
- Increasing the intra-regional flow of Northeast Asian students.
- Increasing the engagement and support of private-sector organizations in supporting students' exchange programs.
- Increasing exchanges through private sector-driven inter-regional forums.

3. Creation of an independent Northeast Asian Youth Parliament for Climate Action to allow youth to directly influence environmental policies in the region through a safe and cooperative approach by

- Training members of the Youth Parliament in topics such as global citizenship, environmental policy, and diplomacy.
- Implementing partnerships with international organizations to obtain support and ensure that the Youth Parliament is able to remain relevant and have an effective impact.
- Engaging national governments to proactively include the Youth Parliament in consultations, national action plans, and measures to cultivate the skills of potential Youth Parliament candidates.

4. Obtaining an inclusive, environmentally and socially sustainable outcome from the Metaverse in Northeast Asia by

- Fostering regional collaboration and multi-stakeholders dialogues between the private and public sectors, including people from diverse backgrounds that are not strictly related to the internet, new technologies, and policymaking.
- Regulating the metaverse to correct the imbalance of power and conflict of interests between corporations and citizens.
- Promoting the development of an inclusive algorithm that allows for the removal of linguistic and physical barriers. ●

Starter: Futuring Peace in Northeast Asia



The project Futuring Peace in Northeast Asia is an initiative launched in 2021 by the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs' (UN DPPA) Asia and the Pacific Division and Innovation Cell. For the second phase in 2022, the project has been executed in collaboration with the Swiss foreign policy think-tank foraus, and co-designed and co-facilitated by youth champions from China, Japan, Mongolia, and the Republic of Korea¹. During the first phase in 2021, the project developed in partnership with UNESCO with support from the National Assembly Futures Institute of Korea. It focused on a train-the-trainer approach, building capabilities in digital facilitation and a contextualized Futures Literacy methodology to build collective visions of the future of peace. More than 40 youth representatives from the region participated in the training. Participants applied through an open call in 2021, with a majority continuing to engage in 2022. Eight representatives were selected to lead the 2022 initiative as youth researchers based on their motivation

on foresight, engagement in the project and interest in peacebuilding. The youth researchers anchored scenarios and recommendations to their local realities and signals of change identified in their groups and communities. In addition, ideas were crowd-sourced through an open online platform with contributions from more than 140 regional intergenerational members of the public.

Young people can play a key role as agents of regional cooperation and sustainable peace, as recognized in United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) on Youth, Peace and Security. These resolutions urge Member States to give youth a greater voice in decision-making at the local, national, regional and international levels and to consider setting up mechanisms that enable young people to participate meaningfully in peace processes. The resolutions underscore the critical role of youth in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. Furthermore, the Secretary-General's *Our Common Agenda* (2021) invites "institutions to establish better ways of listening to people [...], especially groups that are frequently overlooked, such as women, young people, minority groups or persons with disabilities".

In UNSCR 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security, youth is defined as 18-29 years old with the recognition that there are differing definitions at the national and international levels. For the *Futuring Peace in Northeast Asia* project, youth was defined as up to the age of 35 with acknowledgment of the flexibility of the concept.

In Northeast Asia, the presence of young people in high-level political fora is often limited and young people are rarely asked to contribute to substantive regional policy-related discussions or the creation of a collaborative environment. The lack of young people in the public sphere is a missed opportunity, and their exclusion might result in alienation and generational and social divides. Nonetheless, the support of young people is necessary for achieving sustainable peace, preventing conflict, and accelerating the 2030 Agenda in a geopolitically fractured environment. In line with the *Our Common Agenda*, the *Futuring Peace in Northeast Asia* project seeks to strengthen opportunities for Northeast Asian youth to share their observations and recommendations for regional cooperation, peace, and security, as a step towards the broader representation of youth in high-level policy fora. In a region that lacks common security

structures, the project enables the capacity of young people to be at the forefront of regional discussions and engagements.

The objective of the second phase was to use participatory strategic foresight tools to develop concrete recommendations for policymakers, regional institutions, and governments to explore pathways to a peaceful future in the subregion. Questions were framed using the “Futures Triangle” approach, probing participants to think about future outcomes by looking at three dimensions: the push of the present, the pull from the future, and the weight of the past. Through collective scenario building and testing, participants explored different scenarios and identified four key areas for policymaking that will achieve the preferred trajectories, while avoiding and mitigating those unwanted to ensure a peaceful future.

During the workshops, youth participants recognized the criticality of building shared regional experiences that would enable a peaceful future, through for instance education systems, academic exchanges, media, and cultural assets such as movies and literature. Youth participants noted a need for institutionalized youth engagement both within the region, and engagement and sharing best practices with other regions. They noted a need for intergenerational, transnational, and cross-sectoral knowledge sharing and increased regional contact between young people in the region to foster peace, collaboration, and mutual respect. ●

The Kitchen: Participatory Strategic Foresight



From April to September 2022, youth from Northeast Asia participated in several interactive workshops. Every session was built on the outputs of the previous one, starting with trends analysis, scenario building, stress testing, and policy ideation. Each session was designed to maximize the contribution of the youth participants, enhance their creativity and identify innovative solutions. In collaboration with foras, innovative crowd-sourcing methods and participatory structures gave participants opportunities to collectively formulate preferred narratives of the future.

Virtual Dialogue 1: Dynamics of change and strategic uncertainties

The first virtual dialogue in phase II of the project took place in early April 2022. During the session, a group of youth peacebuilders took part in a small, interactive dialogue with experts. Using the futures triangle as a starting point, the participants identified possible dynamics of change for the future, such as the formation of a shared

regional narrative through education and technology. As a result of this workshop, the following strategic uncertainties were identified:

THEME	POLARITY 1	STRATEGIC UNCERTAINTY	POLARITY 2
Economy & Society	Regional cooperation expands	Climate action	Fragmented approach
	Open and on-demand access to information	Knowledge Society	Increased control and censorship of information
Technology & Digitization	Fast digital transformation, high availability	Digitalization of goods	Slow digitalization process, scarcity of digital assets
	Affordable and widespread access to technology	Access to technology	Expensive and complex access to technology
	Quick adoption of virtual and augmented reality	Metaverse	Virtual and augmented reality remain a niche
Education and Culture	Higher offer of quality students exchanges	Regional Education Cooperation	Low interest in regional exchanges
	Increased number of regional cultural products	Exports of Cultural Goods	Cultural market dominated by Western products
	Civil society exchanges driven by youth	Youth Exchanges	Little initiative and support for civil society exchanges

Summer Session 1: Scenario building

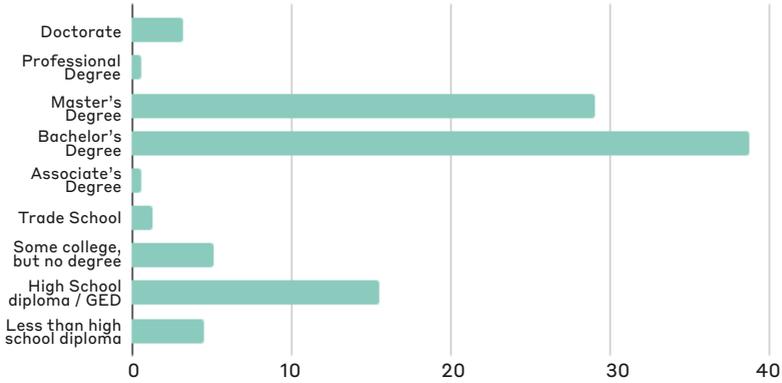
During the first summer session, a group of youth peacebuilders was invited to challenge the status quo and reimagine the future. To stimulate creativity and forward-thinking, the strategic uncertainties

identified in the previous workshop were used to develop qualitative narratives of the future that emphasized possible structural changes and the potential of education tools, new technologies, and innovative approaches to building new regional narratives and commonalities. Throughout the workshop, participants put themselves in the context of the region in 2040 and imagined how changes and interactions between strategic uncertainties could influence future regional narratives. Participants worked collectively on Policy Kitchen² and refined the scenarios in preparation for the following sessions.

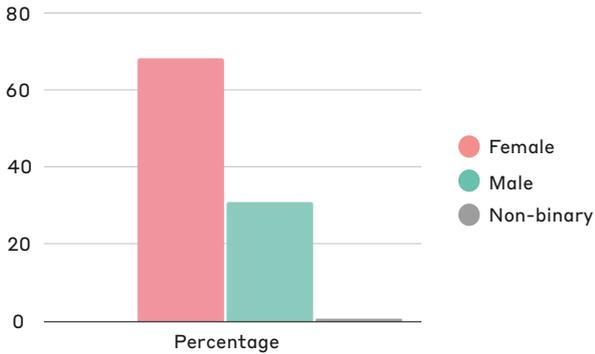
Summer Session 2: Crowd-testing the scenarios

In order to challenge and validate assumptions, the scenarios collectively built by youth in the previous workshops needed to be crowd-tested. To gather as many perspectives as possible, an immersive virtual dialogue using Remesh Flex was designed to reach a wider and more diverse population from the region, encompassing different ages and those that usually do not participate in UN-affiliated dialogues. Remesh, used by DPPA in various inclusion efforts in political and peace processes such as in Libya (2021) and Bolivia (2022), is a digital innovation tool that facilitates online conversation around specific topics. Using the scenarios as a base for the dialogue, an open dialogue was run from 3 - 21 August 2022. A diverse group of more than 140 members of the public of different ages debated the scenarios in five languages (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian and English) and provided additional input. Demographic data were collected to understand the diversity of participants. The data collected from this session showed that contributors were mainly younger people and a majority were women, but with a variation in terms of education levels.

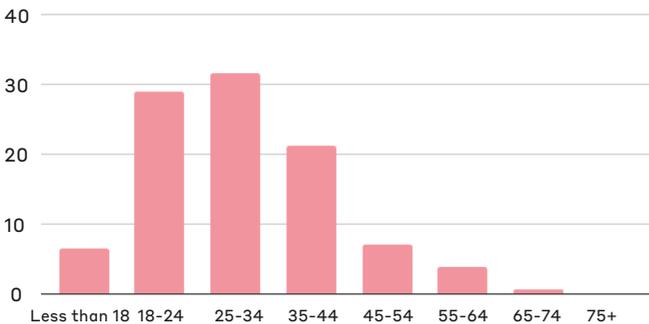
Education Distribution (%)



Gender Distribution (%)



Age Distribution (%)



Summer Session 3: Policy ideation

In the final session, scenarios were redesigned to reflect the outputs of the immersive virtual dialogue. The final workshop engaged youth to co-create pathways of action for the present. By using an open ideation approach, ways of preventing - or increasing - the likelihood of the developed scenarios were envisioned. The final objective of the participatory foresight exercise was to generate innovative policy recommendations, which are reflected in this document, with the goal that these recommendations can inspire and guide policymakers, regional institutions, and governments.

All contributions are public on Policy Kitchen. The full list of authors, project team members, partners, and contributors are presented in the final chapter of this report. ●

Salad: Four Alternative Futures



Through a series of digital engagements, four future scenarios for 2040 were co-created by youth and tested with a larger intergenerational population from Northeast Asia. The four future scenarios reflect a variety of perspectives and are the result of a collective brainstorming process. Some provide a more positive perspective of the future, while others look at more possibilities. While it is not possible to predict the future, future scenarios provide the groundwork for developing resilient policies that can accommodate the dynamics of change and sustain the effects of unforeseeable disruptors. These future scenarios have served as the basis for the recommendations presented in this publication, and include:

- Future A: Future of Culture
- Future B: Knowledge Society under Control
- Future C: The Youth Parliament
- Future D: The Metaverse

Future A

Future of Culture

The Northeast Asia region has seen an increase in the number of cultural products produced. Consuming products from the region makes people feel more connected and there is a strong promotion of regional collaboration for cultural exchange and knowledge, leading to a positive regional transformation. The sharing of national cultural outputs is increasingly shaped by a sense of belonging, which helps develop new narratives of unity. Social media creates new platforms for people to connect and share their cultures, and allows for a more open and interconnected regional space where

people access a variety of cultural products and perspectives.

People in the region are proud of their own cultures and arts, and of their regional cultural products that are spreading across the globe. The region has moved away from the idea of Western soft power being the guiding value and considers its diversity a strength on its own. This confidence has been bolstered by increased economic cooperation and integration, the rise of new cultural actors, and a growing number of international organizations and NGOs focused on promoting regional collaboration.

Future B

Controlled Knowledge Society

Increased control over knowledge may lead to people being exposed to limited perspectives and therefore to forming biased images of the world around them. Through targeted and designed interventions in cultural knowledge production, governments may shape how people think about their own and other cultures. Using economic crisis as an excuse, governments may create laws that restrict open access and participation in the knowledge society. Many citizens may find restrictions

of access to information justified. Nationalist policies and protectionist stances may harm relations with neighboring countries and have a negative impact on education, making it harder for people to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in the future.

Future C

The Youth Parliament

The Regional Youth Parliament is an eco-friendly organization independent of governments and private organizations where everyone's opinions are heard and which encourages the participation of every member. It is an innovative and bold organization open to different views and has decision-making powers regarding regional initiatives. The creation of the Youth Parliament has boosted regional cooperation and integration, and has been an important initiative for shaping regional narratives in Northeast Asia. It has helped to create a sense of regional identity and belonging among young people, who often felt disconnected

from the political process. It has also given young people a chance to engage with their peers from other countries in the region.

By promoting open education and knowledge exchanges the Youth Parliament has supported several initiatives that reduced the gaps in accessing knowledge platforms between different communities and regions. Moreover, the Youth Parliament has boosted trust in government and institutions, particularly among young people that now see a direct way of influencing decision-making in the region.

Future D

The Metaverse

Thanks to the involvement of youth organizations and a close relationship with companies working on the development of the Metaverse, a new way of interacting with each other has emerged. This close cooperation was fundamental to developing a Metaverse where respect, inclusion, fairness and transparency. By implementing decentralized organizational principles, censorship and control over the platforms by both public and private actors were avoided. Because of advanced technologies, language is no longer a barrier and anyone can communicate without problems with everyone else in the region.

With the Metaverse, people can explore different realities, learn about new cultures and lifestyles, discover new things about themselves, and build empathy for others. The possibilities are endless and the potential for education in the Metaverse is great. The Northeast Asia region is leading the way in developing this new form of education, which will have lasting impacts in both Northeast Asia and globally. ●

Main Course



With the four alternative futures in mind, youth participants ideated four policy actions. The four policy avenues are detailed below, each examining the challenges faced, identifying the policy gaps, and outlining the proposed recommendations.

1. Public-Private Partnerships for Digital Literacy Programs in Northeast Asia

Introduction

Promoting regional collaboration for cultural and knowledge exchanges leads to positive changes in peaceful regional and national narrative building. Building cultural narratives, however, requires infrastructure to facilitate healthy exchanges between institutions and people.³ Thus, while the development of social media and the digital

space contribute to enhancing people-to-people communication and cultural exchanges in Northeast Asia (NEA), these online platforms have often become a space of rising hate speech, prejudice, misogyny, and antagonism.⁴ In addition, according to the findings drawn from open online dialogues jointly organized by UN DPPA and foraus in August 2022, with more than 140 intergenerational participants from NEA, these negative emotions often originate from historical grievances, recent conflicts, nationalism, fake news, and disinformation, preventing people from appreciating other cultures and valuing cultural diversity in the region.

Furthermore, there is an over-representation of Western cultures in cultural discourses in NEA and this is evident on social media platforms; this fans the tendency of NEA communities to imitate and promote Western values and cultures at the expense of local cultures.^{5,6} It is also considered one of the factors that prevent people across the region from cultivating a strong cultural power and building a sense of regional identity from its cultural uniqueness.

Policy Gaps

To address the rising issues of hate speech, social media platforms rely on a combination of artificial intelligence, user reporting, and content moderators to regulate people's speech online.⁷ However, these measures are often reactive instead of proactive. Changes to social media platforms, in technological capacity and priorities, often are too rapid for proactive policy changes (for instance, news of Twitter's layoffs - most of which are targeting content moderators). Digital literacy programs, traditionally intended to educate learners on the use of digital technology to create and communicate digital content, can also be proactive programs that can increase users' engagement by ensuring safer spaces online. Current digital literacy programs in NEA are often limited to NGO collaborations, such as with telecommunication companies, or are more narrowly targeted digital literacy programs, such as Facebook/Meta's own literacy program.⁸ While the first serves to address digital gaps, such as questions of access, they do not adequately address the different levels of digital literacy and questions of active and effective engagement. Facebook's own literacy program assumes access and ignores digital gaps. Cross-collaborations across industries and the public-private sphere could

address these gaps. Local collaborations would ensure that cultural and linguistic differences are accounted for.⁹

Recommendations

We believe that a key component to achieving a strong vision of regional culture in NEA is the creation of quality digital literacy programs. Those programs would need to leverage public-private partnerships (PPPs) with a regional focus on education to support the creation of flexible conceptions of regional culture, facilitate receptivity to other regional cultures, and build regional identity. PPPs offer options for appropriate partnerships — bringing together governments, development partners, civil society, and the private business sector to increase the literacy of students and the public's use of information and communication technology (ICT). Public-private partnership for education, particularly for digital literacy has been applied in many countries in Asia and the Pacific region in the last two decades. For example, Microsoft, through Microsoft Innovative Schools Program, a project launched back in 2004, partners with primary and secondary schools in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, China, and provides access to technology solutions, human capital, technology expertise, and knowledge in resources planning and research findings, and therefore equipping students with the digital skills to meet the demands of a knowledge-based economy.¹⁰

To further develop quality digital literacy with a regional focus is about more than the ability to use digital platforms for finding, consuming, evaluating, creating, and communicating digital content; it is the ability to respect cultural diversity, have the mindset of openness and inclusiveness, and be confident in one's understanding and sharing of one's culture.

In-school digital literacy programs for students

The Ministries of Education in the region, together with local schools, should develop different digital literacy courses that are customized to the age and needs of students. The content should have a regional focus, where various aspects of cultures in NEA are included and discussed. At least three different types of digital education levels should be offered as part of the education program: 1) the first level or “early digital education” should focus on students attending

kindergarten-primary school; 2) the second level or “senior digital education” targeting middle school and high school studies, and finally 3) the third level or “mature digital education” for university students. As part of the development of these programs, the Ministries of Education in the region should provide all teachers or educators who are in charge of digital literacy with their own digital literacy training, ensuring that they have a certain level of expertise before providing training for students.

At the same time, stakeholders in private sectors, such as social networking services (SNS)¹¹ and technology suppliers, should provide devices and technical support, such as access to new technologies to improve gaming, videos, and metaverse experiences, and ensure that schools have the necessary resources to teach digital literacy programs in the right context. Programs can also provide the latest knowledge on industrial development, regulation, and digital platform guidelines.

Out-of-school digital literacy programs for the public

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and public institutions in NEA, such as public libraries and community centers, have a key role in creating a learning space for digital literacy. These public spaces are also potential sites for cultural exchange and creation. Therefore, digital literacy programs in these spaces should have a regional focus pertaining to the cultures of NEA, and also pay special awareness to demographics. For instance, older generations often require special care, in particular with regards to new technologies and tech developments, and programs should therefore have curated content and targeted requirements in line with the concept of life-long-learning. Educators who are in charge of digital literacy programs should have access to advance-training in targeted material in a manner that is efficient and effective.

Stakeholders in private sectors, such as SNS and technology suppliers, should provide updated devices and technical support for the adoption and use of new technologies in these spaces. These stakeholders in the private sector should also provide the latest industrial development regarding technological innovation, regulation requirements, and digital platform usage guidelines and principles.

This strengthens the foundations of digital literacy and facilitates individual growth and adaptability to new technologies.

Digital space policymaking for safety and inclusiveness

The Departments of Information and Technology in the region should regulate the SNS in private sectors to ensure a safe and inclusive digital space for communication in NEA. The SNS should take social responsibility to address hate speech and online bullying and violence, and ensure a safe digital space for all users. With the expansion of users and the proliferation of fake news and hate speech, clear guidelines outlining what constitutes hate speech and the possible legal redress, if such acts are committed, would greatly enhance the creation of digital space safety. SNS should collaborate with governments to create robust policies to regulate online speech and digital communication while upholding free speech, as both benefit from the increase of users, and thus user engagement, which would result from a safe, peaceful and welcoming digital space.

2. Furthering Educational and Technological Cooperation for Northeast Asian Youth

Introduction

There are many prominent intra-regional educational initiatives in Northeast Asia. For instance, the Trilateral Cooperation Summit (TCS) — a Northeast Asian international organization — annually organizes the “Trilateral Youth Summit” (TYS) to promote understanding among Chinese, Japanese, and Korean youth¹². Moreover, the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean governments have held annual “International Youth Exchange Programs” for decades¹³. In the private sector, educational platforms such as the Bai Xian Asia Institute (BXAI), provide education programs and scholarships for Asian youth. In particular, BXAI aims to “pave the way towards a prosperous, sustainable, and conflict-free modern Asia through its initiatives”¹⁴.

In contrast, there is little coordination among Northeast Asian countries over technological use. This is evident in the field

of education and narrative building. Northeast Asian countries have yet to fully utilize new technologies for multilingual learning¹⁵. Moreover, each country and its citizens have different approaches and understandings regarding emerging technologies. The differences in preferred social media platforms also makes it difficult for people in the region to exchange ideas. While Chinese youth use WeChat and Weibo extensively, Japanese youth favor LINE, South Korean youth utilize Daum/KakaoTalk, while Mongolian youth prefer more global social networks such as Facebook¹⁶.

Overall, despite the existence of numerous educational initiatives, language barriers and different technological platforms make it difficult for Northeast Asian youth to engage in international dialogues. Therefore, Northeast Asian youth are hindered from being exposed to multinational perspectives. In the long term, the lack of intra-regional dialogues may negatively impact regional narrative formation, economic cooperation, and peacebuilding. The scarcity of regional interaction and dialogues may exacerbate conflicts and a feeling of paranoia and mistrust within the region.

Policy Gaps

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken its toll on intra-regional study abroad programs. China was a popular study-abroad destination for Japanese students before 2019. Based on surveyed data from Japanese universities, the Japan Student Services Organization found that China was the fifth most popular destination for Japanese students in 2018 (with 7,980 students)¹⁷. In contrast, data was not found on the number of Japanese students studying in mainland China for 2020, as X1 student visas were not issued to Japan-based applicants from March 2020 to August 2022¹⁸.

Furthermore, Northeast Asian youth may engage in discussions on regional narratives through new technologies, but such technologies could also be misused to restrict people's access to various information. While Northeast Asian youth have the technological means to connect, due to new forms of social networking services, they face several communication barriers such as language, "internet nationalism," xenophobia, ethnocentrism, misogyny, and fake news¹⁹.

Recommendations

A multitude of stakeholders, such as Ministries of Education, civil society organizations (CSOs), and the private sector, should participate in Northeast Asian educational and technological collaboration to further regional narratives and peacebuilding.

In the long term (by 2040):

- **Regional Ministries of Education should encourage youth to learn another Northeast Asian language**, through funding language study abroad programs. Acquiring a second Northeast Asian language will incentivize youth to access various technological platforms, become less inward-looking, and avoid echo chambers.
- **Northeast Asian civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should further their participation in accountability processes and ensure citizens' access to information.** As stated in the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), civil societies have a vital role in fighting corruption.²⁰ Specifically, Northeast Asian civil societies can help ensure reporters' anonymity, utilize blockchain technologies to protect public records and documents, and establish effective governance within their organizations, to diminish corruption in the knowledge society.

In the mid-term:

- **Regional Ministries of Education should provide free access or reduced tuition fees for public secondary and higher education and cover the costs of student meals**, in order to incentivize citizens' participation in education and increase the intra-regional flow of Northeast Asian students. Northeast Asian governments should also allocate increased grants for international academic and artistic projects related to Northeast Asian regional identity, such as the "Trilateral Arts Festival" organized by TCS²¹.

Within the next decade:

- **Northeast Asian private sectors should increase funding for regional exchange student programs** and compensate for the scarcity of funded scholarships offered by national governments in the region. This will promote regional narrative-building and empower Northeast Asians within the international society.

In the short term:

- **For-profit companies should lead or become crucial participants in regional forums to address the need for bottom-up initiatives** for regional cooperation and narrative building. For instance, the Japanese business world played a crucial role in the “1st Japan-China Third Country Market Cooperation Forum” by seeking out “cooperative projects” and expanding their international business network.²²

3. Northeast Asian Youth Parliament for Climate Action

Introduction

Northeast Asian countries have successfully adapted and transformed their policies and societies throughout history, demonstrating their determination and capacity for change. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case yet for climate action. Data collected and analyzed by the Climate Action Tracker revealed that the environmental policies of China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) are insufficient at best, leaving them far behind in achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. Mongolia recently launched the Billion Trees initiative to contribute to climate action but still remains heavily reliant on coal during the long winter months²³.

This lack of initiative also extends to youth engagement in policymaking. Young people in the region have shown on multiple occasions that they are invested in shaping the future of their countries, with the 2011 University Tuition Crisis in ROK and the

2015 anti-war protests in Japan being just two of many examples. However, studies revealed that many Asian youth still “feel alienated from political affairs, and are thus reluctant to engage with such matters”²⁴. It is reflected in data as well, with the average age of parliamentarians in all four countries being fifty or older²⁵. East Asia as a region has the lowest percentage of parliamentarians under 40 years in the world, currently standing at 5.5%, with global average at 17%. The number of female parliamentarians is similarly low, with the regional average standing at 21%.

Policy Gaps

Energy is one area in which one can identify the biggest gap between climate action and reality. Just recently, despite its past commitments to transitioning to a more sustainable economy, China decided to improve energy security amid widespread power shortages, leading to a significant increase in coal production²⁶. While Japan has made notable attempts over the years to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, skepticism remains as well. Japan has focused on working closely with the industry for responsible energy consumption but with many countries already meeting their 2030 targets in 2019, there was skepticism about whether the goals are “indeed ambitious enough”²⁷. The ROK is no exception, having “fallen far short of the world average in renewable energy use”, evidence of its long road ahead to meet its pledge of achieving carbon neutrality in 2050²⁸. In Mongolia, with rapid urbanization and industrialization, waste management has become a major challenge. Despite passing legislation in 2017 to improve the situation, “sustainable solutions have yet to be found and implemented”, and many people are still discarding plastic waste illegally²⁹.

One of the most significant initiatives that call for the inclusion of young people in facilitating international collaboration and sustaining peace is the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda. Unfortunately, even as more experts and governments recognize the critical role of young people, this agenda is missing in some of the National Action Plans of the four Northeast Asian countries^{30,31}. In a region often characterized by geopolitical tensions, the lack of a strong policy to push for peace with the support of young people raises concerns about whether collaboration to address climate change is possible.

Recommendations

The proposed regional Youth Parliament could be the solution to both problems. This organization aims to create a platform in which youth can directly influence environmental policies in the region. Independent from international agencies or national governments, the Youth Parliament consists of a team of five elected members between the ages of eighteen to thirty-two from each country in the region. To ensure its smooth integration into national systems, the members of this parliament will be elected from existing Youth Councils or other similar organizations. Governments are encouraged to establish a multilateral agreement that recognizes the Youth Parliament, its role, and how the state aims to engage with the youth parliamentarians. Operating under a rotating presidency among the representative countries, the Youth Parliament is a safe space to bring topics relevant to regional cooperation to the table, and decisions are made based on a voting system, with each team given one vote.

Its focus will be climate action, as it is an issue that is rapidly gaining more youth support and one that requires multilateral cooperation. Some concrete outcomes envisaged as part of this initiative are technological alliances, joint projects, and research for renewable energy, as well as on other matters that require a regional approach. International agencies and governments are welcome to utilize this space as a communication and advocacy channel. The Youth Parliament can expand into the Metaverse to become a communication channel that is more inclusive, thus overcoming traditional barriers to accessibility.

All members of the Youth Parliament are expected to undergo formal training in topics such as global citizenship, environmental policy, and diplomacy. As such, they will be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively address pressing environmental issues. This organization ultimately aims to deliver the outcomes of parliamentary sessions to respective governments and to ensure they are included in national policies.

Despite its independent nature, partnerships are indispensable to ensure that the Youth Parliament is relevant. Therefore, the following are recommendations to potential partners to support the establishment and operation of this body:

Recommendations for International Organizations:

Global organizations (such as the UN, World Bank), environmental institutions (such as Global Environment Facility, Green Climate Fund, Global Green Growth Institute), and regional organizations (such as Asian Development Bank, UN ESCAP, Renewable Energy Institute, Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat), as well as political foundations (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Konrad Adenauer Foundation), could support the creation and organization of the Youth Parliament in the following ways:

- **Initiate the creation of the regional Youth Parliament** through facilitating dialogue, using their talent pool and convening power. Organize discussions with youth in their networks and partner with youth organizations to gauge interest and elicit feedback on the initial concept.
- **Support physical spaces for the quarterly meetings to take place**, whether by renting a meeting space or providing space in their own organizations.
- **Provide comprehensive global citizenship education and training to young people for free.** Organizations such as UNESCO APCEIU have free platforms and content that could be expanded and international organizations can create their own training programs for members of the Youth Parliament.
- **Establish a dedicated program(s) within institutions of higher education to prepare young people to be parliamentary members.** The program can cover various topics such as foreign policy, diplomacy, environmental, economic, and social policy, as well as soft skills such as negotiation, teamwork, and communication. The program duration should be for a half year minimum and the graduates will be awarded diplomas that can be utilized as a prerequisite for candidacy. Specializations, for example in economic policy, may be pursued.
- **Organize sessions with professionals in relevant areas of parliamentary work** to begin training for potential Youth

Parliament candidates and to expand young people's knowledge and skills.

- **Send youth delegates to other regional bodies** (such as ASEAN and the EU) to learn more about these organizations, exchange experiences through interacting with their youth bodies, and inform the structure and organization of the Youth Parliament.
- **Ensure attendance from the group of representatives from the Youth Parliament in international conferences** (such as UNGA, ECOSOC, Davos etc.) as a way to communicate the findings and resolutions from the parliament with the rest of the world.

Recommendations for National Governments:

- **National government agencies in charge of youth affairs should hold national-level consultations** on youth activism in the region and the establishment of the regional Youth Parliament to promote youth inclusion in decision-making.
- **Include the concept of the Youth Parliament in their national action plans** for YPS implementation. This ensures the legitimacy of the Youth Parliament and provides a framework for government collaboration with the parliament.
- **Establish youth leadership schemes** (such as the Teen Parliament³² in Mongolia) to start cultivating potential Youth Parliament member candidates.
- **Support national youth organizations** in building their capacity and strengthening their networks in preparation for Youth Parliament elections.

4. The Metaverse in Northeast Asia

Introduction

The term metaverse describes the “future of the internet” as a network of virtual worlds focused on social connection, including virtual reality and augmented reality. The term does not refer to one specific type of technology, but rather a broad shift in how we interact with technology. The metaverse is still in its infancy in many respects; there is currently no international agreement on the regulation of the metaverse. While its potential benefits and risks are still unknown, technological progress and institutional regulation are expected to progress. More than 160 companies are working to reshape global and regional exchanges and engagement through the use of new technologies³³. Most of the main stakeholders are based in Western countries. It is undeniable that the metaverse offers new opportunities to test solutions, enhancing awareness of climate-focused initiatives as well as reimagining the future of learning.

In order to fully leverage the opportunities offered by the metaverse, there are a number of challenges at hand that must be addressed. Firstly, there are regulatory challenges, which also include accessibility, interoperability, and privacy in the metaverse³⁴. The Gartner³⁵ predicts that by 2026, 25 percent of people will spend at least an hour a day in the metaverse. This means a large percentage of society will be affected by the metaverse and authorities may want to manage its impact. As online platforms are known to be a space of rising hate speech, prejudice, discrimination, and antagonism, metaverse platforms³⁶, while also containing a high level of anonymity, could potentially be used as vehicle to accelerate these issues within Northeast Asia. Secondly, the issue of electricity consumption due to an increased use of the metaverse has been raised. However, in the United States for instance, decreased travel due to digitalization has reduced CO2 emissions and the metaverse may rather contribute to reductions. Thirdly, there are challenges of accessibility, affordability, and lack of educational content associated with education through the metaverse.³⁷

Policy Gaps

When considering the future of the metaverse, one of the most perplexing issues is about the actors who will create regulation. It is a challenge to effectively control a space where the impact of technological innovation on humanity and the environment is unknown, where the internet space is decentralized and transnational, and where digitalization is progressing and multiple industries are involved. The ideas around the scope of influence of state power and the concept of privacy and data protection are not universal but regional and culturally based. In terms of accessibility, the UN's Our Common Agenda³⁸ has called for universal digital access by 2030. International organizations and national governments have already taken initiatives to improve Internet accessibility. In this regard, the Internet's space in our lives in the future will be increasingly viewed as a public arena. Issues about ownership and operation of the Internet as an infrastructure that has proven problematic for existing Internet services³⁹ will similarly be seen in the metaverse if platforms are monopolized. In addition, given the geopolitical importance of Northeast Asia, the increased animosity between nations due to the unregulated metaverse could be a geopolitical risk in a region where there is conflict and tension between nations.

Policy Recommendations

Currently, the metaverse is being developed primarily by Western tech companies. The scope of impact of such technology and virtual reality, however, is vast. In order to make the spaces of the metaverse, which will expand and affect the whole world including Northeast Asia, more inclusive and to avoid it becoming a breeding ground for division and hatred, multi-stakeholder cooperation is needed. When the extended world becomes our reality, in addition to the real world, collaboration at the national, regional, and global levels, as well as across public and private sectors, will be essential. These processes must also encompass the reality of ordinary people, which have often been marginalized.

Developing Northeast Asian metaverse platforms

Northeast Asia has been heavily influenced by Western culture, yet many Northeast Asian countries have world-class technological

capabilities. Each country in Northeast Asia should take the initiative to foster increased interaction between relevant industries, research institutions/academia and governments, in order to develop platforms originating from Northeast Asia and prevent monopolies and oligopolies by a small number of Western companies. In addition, intra-regional cooperation should be actively pursued to accelerate R&D and also to decentralize power within the metaverse.

Promoting the development of inclusive algorithms that allows for the removal of linguistic and physical barriers

In the metaverse physical distance has become irrelevant. Traditional cooperation between countries in the region is often challenging, but in light of divergences in historical awareness, territorial disputes, and increased hate speech and hate crimes when tensions between nations rise, regional cooperation remains as important as ever. In Northeast Asia, domestic discussions are primarily conducted in the native language of each country, and there are few opportunities to come in contact with public discourses from other countries. It is necessary that governments take steps to collectively develop algorithms for active trans-language information exchanges and measures to prevent excessive filter bubbles. Legislation in each country, as well as regional agreements, are required in order to enable the creation of regional narratives to promote peaceful relations in the region.

Fostering inclusive regional collaboration and multi-stakeholders dialogues between the private and public sectors

As a model for a similar regional initiative in Northeast Asia, the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) hosts annual meetings to bring people from various stakeholder groups from both public and private sectors together to discuss internet-related public policy issues. The IGF's philosophy and initiative of a forum for exchange of ideas, whether public or private and regardless of region, is excellent. Yet, in the metaverse where the physical and virtual worlds are more proximate, people from fields other than the Internet, new technologies and policymaking fields, should also be engaged and heard. Furthermore, diversity beyond nationality, such as people in marginalized communities, youth, different social classes, gender

and sexuality, disabilities etc. should also be factors of consideration. Regulations must be created that correct the imbalance in the potential conflicts of interest between powerful corporations and vulnerable citizens. The current IGF has mega-corporations as donors, but it also needs to function as a forum to give those with less power a voice. IGF also has National, Regional, and Youth IGFs (NRIs) as self-funded and voluntary activities; these should be official initiatives with official funding support to contribute to inter/intra-regional collaboration, and IGF or similar initiatives could partner with other international organizations such as the United Nations. ●

Dessert: Conclusion

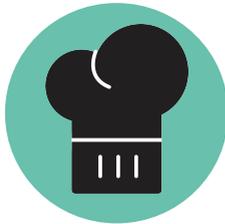


Through the Futuring Peace in Northeast Asia project, youth participants from Northeast Asia reflected on a variety of futures related to the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda, seeking regional commonalities and identifying entry points for dialogue. They identified topics and themes that build new forward-looking approaches, and explored how young people can contribute to increased cooperation and peacebuilding in Northeast Asia. Through collective scenario building and testing with a wider intergenerational public, participants identified four key areas for policy-making, including **establishing digital literacy programs, furthering educational and technological cooperation, creating a regional youth parliament, as well as fostering an inclusive Metaverse.**

The project has demonstrated that interaction between youth from Northeast Asia can help identify the challenges and opportunities ahead for this generation and for the region. Not only has the project provided valuable recommendations, but also

contributed to building trust, cohesion, and sustained relationships transcending national borders. Through dialogue and conversations, participants have learned about the perspectives, histories, and visions of youth from other countries. In the project's continuation, the impact will be increased by providing platforms for the youth to present their ideas and policy recommendations to a broader audience both within Northeast Asia and on the global stage. ●

Chefs: Behind the scenes



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Futuring peace in Northeast Asia

Futuring peace in Northeast Asia is an initiative by the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UN DPPA) dedicated to strengthening opportunities for Northeast Asian youth to share their unique observations for regional peace and security with policymakers, as a step towards the broader representation of youth in high-level policy fora.

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